

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTICES.

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For a very long period the illustrated works devoted to Natural History in Great Britain were considered inferior in their execution, and in the scope of their plan, to those published in France and Germany. The splendid works of Levaillant and Vieillet, of Meyer and Wolfe, and of Humboldt, in Zoology and Botany, mostly published either immediately previous to, or about the commencement of, the present century, were looked upon as the height of finish which plates of this character could be brought to, and as the models which future naturalists were to endeavour to equal. At the period alluded to, the continent still continued to advance in its beautiful volumes published at the national expense, which accompanied every voyage of discovery, and without which, indeed, the record of the expedition was looked upon as incomplete. They combined the progress of science with the improvement of the arts which a few years gradually carries with them; but it was perhaps not much before the year 1820 that British naturalists began to revive the character of their illustrated works, by attention to the pictorial department. At the present time this will bear the palm both for execution and composition, while it approaches very near to the minute accuracy for which the productions of the continent are still deservedly famed.

The illustrations of Mr. Audubon's remarkable work were commenced in Edinburgh, so far as we can recollect, about 1826, at first under comparatively little encouragement, from the circumstance of subscribers thinking that the requisite expense and labour could not be continued with regularity; and it is a proud thing for the metropolis of Scotland to say, that this gigantic work was undertaken there, after having passed the cities of America and France and England, while it is equally gratifying to know that the plates executed there can bear comparison with the best of those which have been elsewhere engraved. This part of the work, "comprising four hundred and thirty-five plates, with one thousand and sixty-five figures, was finished on the 20th of June last;" and although some of the plates might be justly criticised, we should be illiberal indeed were we to endeavour to pick out the minor faults of a series so extensive, and containing many pictures beautiful both in drawing and composition.

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Mr. Audubon's previous volumes have been so frequently extracted from for the amusement and information of the general reader, that the manner in which he treats his subjects is familiarly known, and we shall now interfere with little criticism. The style is undoubtedly peculiar; and from the pen of any other, or from that of an imitator, it would read and sound extremely affected; but knowing the man, and thinking that we hear him tell the tale while we read it, every feeling is lost in the freshness of the picture, and in the truthfulness of the detail. A little want of courtesy is sometimes manifested towards those whom he may think do not possess sufficient knowledge of the North American Fauna, and some disdain is exhibited towards the opinions of systematists; but while he points out those traits of habit which frequently confirm the "suspicions" of the theorist he condemns, he cannot resist generalising himself, according to the manners of the birds which he has had such ample opportunities of studying, and which he has so often beautifully described; and if he would bear this in mind, he might perhaps find some apology for the ornithologist who mourns that various causes do not permit him to enjoy the advantages of the "woodsman," and who only ventures to turn his recorded practical knowledge to the formation or support of his own opinions.

The volume before us is scarcely so original as its predecessors, owing to many of the species having been procured from other travellers, and the accounts of their habits taken from the notes which they furnished. It was scarcely to be expected that one individual could personally examine the habits of all the birds of so vast a tract, and a general history would have been incomplete without the introduction, so far as known, of every species. We miss also the 'Episodes' which gave such vivid accounts of scenery,—the forest and prairie, the flood and war of elements, the chase, and the manners of the squatter and woodsman. This part is here occupied with anatomical details by Mr. Macgillivray. Mr. Audubon, during his last journey, having brought over many specimens in spirits, they have been dissected, and their anatomy is now illustrated by bold

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The Turnstone, *Streptilas Interpres*, is plentiful on the southern coasts of the United States, and was observed in April and May in Texas and Mexico; it was however looked for in vain on the Labrador coast, and its breeding-places were not discovered. Mr. Audubon makes the following remarks on its affinities: "I have always looked upon the Turnstone, while at its avocations, as a species very nearly allied to the Oyster-catcher; and although it certainly differs in some particulars, were I to place it in a position determined by its affinities, I should remove it at once from the *Tringa* family. Its mode of searching for food around pebbles and other objects, the comparative strength of its legs, its retiring disposition, and its loud whistling notes while on the wing, will, I think, prove at some period, that what I have ventured to advance may be in accordance with the only true system." We have little doubt that our author is here right; and this bird and *Hæmatopus* have elsewhere been shown to be the medium by which the connexion was wrought out between the *Ardeadae*, *Scolopacidae* and *Charadriadae*. It is a bird easily tamed, and like the Oyster-catchers, thrives well where access can be given to a supply of water.

The Great Northern Diver, *Colymbus glacialis*. The American range of this bird is very extended; it has been "met with in winter on all the water-courses of the United States. I have seen it along the whole of our Atlantic coast, from the Maine to the extremity of Florida, and from thence to the mouths of the Mississippi and the shores of Texas. It occurs on the waters that fall into the Pacific, and has been observed on the Columbia rivers; in the fur countries it is plentiful." In its incubation it resembles the black-throated species, placing the nest sometimes near the water, and sometimes a short way distant, in the latter case having a path wrought by the passage of the bird to and from it. The eggs Mr.

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Common Tern, *Sterna Hirundo*. "Although the Prince of Musignano states that the bird named the Common Tern in America differs from that bearing the same name in Europe, and has, in consequence, changed its appellation to that of Wilson's Tern, I am of opinion that no difference exists between the Terns of the two continents." If we have read the prince's works aright, we think this is not the case. The prince, in his observations on Wilson's nomenclature, considers the European and American species identical; in the 'Osservazione sulla seconda edizione del Regno Animale,' *Wilson's plate* only is said to be quoted as referring to another species, the *St. Wilsoni*, Bonap.; and in the latest work, 'Comparative List of the Birds of Europe and North America,' published in 1838, *St. Hirundo*, *Arctica* and *Dougallii* are all given as common to both continents, while *St. Wilsoni* (the *St. Hirundo*, Wilson, not Linnæus,) is marked as American only, and *St. minuta* is represented by *St. argentea*, Nuttall. This seems the real state of the species, and Mr. Audubon has taken unnecessary trouble in making comparisons for this purpose, though they may be of use in teaching us the range of variations to which species may be subject.

Spotted Sandpiper, *Totanus Macularia*, occurred abundantly from Texas to the shores of Labrador, breeding and rearing their young in the whole range. This species seems to be more careful than usual in the building and selecting a station for the nest: in an island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, they were placed among the tall slender grass; and in Labrador they were concealed under ledges of rocks extending several feet over them, were made of dry moss from six to nine inches high, and well finished with slender grasses and feathers of the Eider Duck.

Long-tailed Duck, *Harelda glacialis*. Ranges as far south as Texas and the mouth of the Columbia river, and breeds by the fresh-water lakes on the coast of Labrador. The nests were placed under bushes eight or nine feet from the edge of the water, and were formed of rather coarse grass, with a layer of finer weeds, covered with the down of the birds.

The Knot, *Tringa cinerea*. Found ranging along the coast far south, but was unsuccessful in finding its breeding stations, which seem yet among the desiderata of the European ornithologist. Cer-

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The Knot, *Tringa cinerea*. Found ranging along the coast far south, but was unsuccessful in finding its breeding stations, which seem yet among the desiderata of the European ornithologist. Cer-

Audubon considers to be most frequently three in number; he has experienced and confirms the speed and excellence of their diving and progressing under water, and acknowledges himself "outdone by a loon." We consider that this bird, if unhurt, can beat any oared boat without rising from the waters.

Common Tern, *Sterna Hirundo*. "Although the Prince of Musignano states that the bird named the Common Tern in America differs from that bearing the same name in Europe, and has, in consequence, changed its appellation to that of Wilson's Tern, I am of opinion that no difference exists between the Terns of the two continents." If we have read the prince's works aright, we think this is not the case. The prince, in his observations on Wilson's nomenclature, considers the European and American species identical; in the 'Osservazione sulla seconda edizione del Regno Animale,' *Wilson's plate* only is said to be quoted as referring to another species, the *St. Wilsoni*, Bonap.; and in the latest work, 'Comparative List of the Birds of Europe and North America,' published in 1838, *St. Hirundo*, *Arctica* and *Dougallii* are all given as common to both continents, while *St. Wilsoni* (the *St. Hirundo*, Wilson, not Linnaeus,) is marked as American only, and *St. minuta* is represented by *St. argentea*, Nuttall. This seems the real state of the species, and Mr. Audubon has taken unnecessary trouble in making comparisons for this purpose, though they may be of use in teaching us the range of variations to which species may be subject.

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Little Sandpiper, *Tringa pusilla*, Wils. Under this title the Little Sandpiper figured by Wilson, pl. 37, is described without any European synonym; and the whole small species mentioned by Temminck and others are disclaimed as American,—an opinion countenanced by that of Bonaparte, who has omitted them in his last comparative sketch; we, however, yet think it requires investigation to show that the European birds are not found in, or are not identical with, that of America. The little bird in question was found breeding abundantly on the moss-clad crests of the highest rocks on the coast of Labrador, within a short distance of the sea.

Solan Goose or Gannet, *Sula Bassana*, is considered by Mr. Audubon as identical in America with the bird of the Bass-rock. The Prince of Musignano, in his last work, gives it as different, under the title of *S. Americana*, but has not mentioned the differences.

Gooseander, *Mergus Merganser*. During the season of incubation closely resembles the Red-breasted species, *M. Serrator*, so abundant on our northern lochs. The former has not yet been discovered breeding in Britain; but in America, the interior of the states of New York, Massachusetts and Maine, are much frequented by it. The nest is generally placed on a small island, is very large, sometimes raised seven or eight inches on the top of a bed of all the dead weeds which the bird can gather in the neighbourhood; it is rather neatly formed of fibrous roots, lined round the edge with the down of the bird. The eggs seven or eight in number, and of a uniform dull cream colour.

Golden-Eye, *Clangula vulvaris*. The habits of this bird in America seem exactly similar to those which frequent the lochs and streams of Britain during the winter; and the fact of the species

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